IN MEMORIAM ANNE JENSEN

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As a member of the “Wissenschaftliche Beirat” for the Research Project *Frau und Christentum* (1982-87), I first met Anne Jensen when she was research assistant at the Institute for Ecumenical Research in Tübingen University, directed by Professor Hans Küng. Like myself she was “francophone” and we shared the intellectual experience of French Reform Catholicism. I quickly found that we had a shared motivation for the study of Ancient Christianity from a gender perspective. We both wanted our Catholic Church to serve as Christ’s salvational instrument and not to act as institutional blockage between women and God.

Vividly intelligent (her father J. Hans D. Jensen received the Nobel Prize in Physics 1963), Anne Jensen had been a Benedictine nun for thirteen years (1964-77). Unlike erudite Benedictine monks, cf. the Swiss Professor of Patristics, Basil Studer (1925-2008), she could not have pursued a scholarly career in her female monastery.

When Hans Küng lost his “missio canonica” in 1979, the Institute was in 1980 transferred from the Faculty of Catholic Theology to direct administration by the President of Tübingen University. It is important to specify that this independence from Vatican control made it possible to establish teaching and research in Feminist Theology and Gender Studies. *Frau und Christentum* (funded by the Stiftung Volkswagenwerk) was structured in two parts: *Frauen in frühen Christentum*, assigned to Dr. Bernadette J. Brooten, and *Protestantische Frauenbewegung im 20. Jahrhundert*, accomplished by Dr. Doris Kaufmann. When Bernadette Brooten decided to focus on lesbian women in the Roman world, published as *Love Between Women. Early Christian Responses to Female Homoeroticism*, Chicago IL, London 1996, Anne Jensen, who had got Promotion in „Ostkirchliche Orthodoxie”, took in 1985 over her part. This research resulted in the excellent *Habilitationsschrift*, published as *Gottes selbstbewusste Töchter.*
Provoked by Anne Jensen’s pioneering analysis of practically all extant Greek and Latin sources on women in Christian Antiquity, the institutional Roman Church reacted with the obstruction of her professional career, cf. the rather understated account “Auf dem Weg zur feministischen Theologie” in Irmtraud Fischer (ed.), *Theologie von Frauen für Frauen?* (Exegese unserer Zeit 18), Wien, Münster 2007, 79-83. Therefore, I find it necessary to outline Anne Jensen’s canonical obstacle course as a clear example of the current conflict between academic freedom and Vatican control of Catholic Theology. In fact, the Roman Catholic Bishops’ legal right to approve or oppose candidates nominated for theological chairs in State Universities results from the German *Reichskonkordat* with the Holy See of 1933, which was later transferred to Bundesländer, cf. the similar Concordat with Austria.

In 1991, Hermann Josef Vogt, Professor of Ancient Church History in the Catholic Theological Faculty of Tübingen University, sought to impede Anne Jensen’s Habilitation with a negative “Gutachten”, accurately contested by Hans Küng. Together with Willy Rordorf, Professor of Patristics in the Protestant Theological Faculty of Neuchâtel University, I was called to evaluate Anne Jensen’s work. We both concluded very positively and in 1992 she was admitted to habilitate on the theme “Christliche Frauen der Spätantike”. I cite from my “Gutachten” of January 12, 1992: “Dr. Jensen’s work provides the first comprehensive survey of preserved material concerning women in Early Christian/Late Antique Graeco-Roman civilisation. Analysing all relevant texts found in the church histories of Eusebios, Sokrates, Sozomenos and Theodoret, together with other known sources, she presents a complete outline of available information with regard to: a) Women’s factual existence and activity during the formative stages of Christianity. b) Canonical prescriptions and doctrinal statements on women’s role and status in church and society through the first five centuries. Dr. Jensen’s very thorough collection and examination of these sources prove particularly fruitful by confronting possible knowledge of women’s life as martyrs, prophets or ascetics with theological discourse on virginity or widowhood. Comparing 4th-century Eusebios with 5th-century church historians, Dr. Jensen demonstrates that the declining influence of charismatic women corresponds to growing ecclesiastical institutionalisation.” Approved by bishop (later cardinal) Walter Kasper, she received canonical authorisation to teach in the fields of ecumenical theology and so-called “theologische Frauenforschung”.

When Hans Küng retired in 1995, his Institute was restored to the Faculty of Catholic Theology, but Anne Jensen’s position was suppressed. Without success, the President of Tübingen University appealed to the Federal Ministry of Science and Research to fund her further employment. He referred to recent refusals of “nihil obstat” when Anne Jensen had won academic competitions for university chairs in the Catholic Theological Faculties of Münster and Graz. She was evidently placed on a Vatican black list, not least because of the article “Frauenordination und ökumenischer Dialog” in *Theologische Quartalschrift* 173, 1993, 236-241 (i.e. before the Vatican ban, cf. *Ordinatio sacerdotalis* 1994 and *Responsio* 1995), republished in ed. Walter Gross, *Frauenordination. Stand der Diskussion in der katholischen Kirche*, München 1996, 100-105.

Together with Ursula King, Professor of Religious Studies at Bristol University, then President of the European Society for Women in Theological Research (founded in 1986), and other leading feminist theologians, I wrote to the Federal Ministry in favour of Anne Jensen. We emphasized her outstanding research and the importance of supporting high quality Gender Studies in Theology, but to no avail.

Impressed by Anne Jensen’s strong scholarship, I had selected her as vice-chairperson for the first European Research Conference in the Humanities: *Women in the Christian Tradition, from Late Antiquity to Age of Reform*. Funded by the European Science Foundation in Strasbourg, I organised this in 1992 and the successful series continued in 1995 and 1998. Unfortunately, Anne Jensen declined to lead the second Conference because she felt exhausted by the canonical blockage of her University career.

Nevertheless, in 1995/96 she was Visiting Professor in Feminist Theology at the Evangelical Faculty of Humboldt University in Berlin and in 1996/97 also at the Catholic Theological Faculty in Münster University. After more than three years of Vatican censure and helped by Bishop Johann Weber, who kept her orally informed since she was denied access to the written material, Anne Jensen finally received in 1996 the “nihil obstat” for a chair in Graz University. In 1997 she was installed as Professor and Director of the "Institut für Ökumenische Theologie, Ostkirchliche Orthodoxie and Patrologie". When the Vatican persisted in pressing for an affirmation of women’s cultic *impedimentum sexus*, Anne Jensen firmly resisted.

In a historical perspective, it is important to emphasise that Anne Jensen’s long fight for scholarly recognition by her own so-called *Mater Ecclesia* was not exceptional. Although three other Catholic women theologians received the “nihil obstat” for chairs in Germany, Austria and Switzerland in 1996, Dr. Teresa
Berger had now been refused approval for five chairs in Germany. Consequently, she emigrated to be Professor at Duke University in North Carolina, USA. Another excellent theologian, Dr. Silvia Schroer, was denied the "nihil obstat" for a chair in Tübingen University. In 1997, she was (ecumenically!) installed as Professor of Old Testament and Biblical Studies in the Protestant Faculty of Bern University.

An outstanding model of faithful tenacity, the eminent medievalist Elisabeth Gössmann (geb. 1928) holds the record of thirty-seven refused applications for chairs in theology or philosophy in German Universities, cf. Geburtsfehler: Weiblich. Lebenserinnerungen einer katholischen Theologin, München 2003. As the first German woman, Elisabeth Gössmann obtained a doctoral degree in Catholic Theology at München University in 1954, but in 1963 the German Catholic Bishops’ Conference refused her application to habilitate there. Until 1972, only priests were allowed to habilitate and thereby to qualify for chairs in Catholic Theological Faculties of State Universities. Having emigrated in 1955 to teach Western Philosophy at the (Jesuit) Sheisin Women’s University in Tokyo, Elisabeth Gössmann only obtained Habilitation in Medieval Philosophy at München University in 1979. Therefore, Graz University is to be commended for awarding Elisabeth Gössmann a Doctorate honoris causa in Theology as early as 1985 (cf. Frankfurt University 1994, Bamberg and Lucerne Universities 2003).

As a pioneer in Late Antique Matristics, Anne Jensen both analysed and struggled with the millennial subordination of womankind which is dominant throughout the history of Christianity. In books and articles she made these Church Mothers visible as acting subjects in the process of Christian inculturation. Anne Jensen’s publications equally demonstrate her ecumenical concern, especially through knowledge of the Orthodox Churches. Anne Jensen’s sizeable œuvre is even more admirable when considered in the context of the anxiety she suffered for many years, and which was mainly caused by the continuous intervention of Vatican authorities in her professional life. This painful experience led to Anne Jensen’s tragic malady and premature death. Let us remember her constant faith in Christ’s Catholic Church by citing from the requiem liturgy: “In Paradisum deducant te Angeli: in tuo adventu suscipiant te Martyres, et perducant te in civitatem sanctam Jerusalem.”

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